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SUBJECT: DEPUTY SECRETARY SHARES VIEWS ON LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES, SECURITY, REGIONAL TIES WITH FORMER PM AL-JAFARI

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Former Iraqi Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jafari told the Deputy Secretary June 13 that Baghdad security had deteriorated, and al-Jafari worried about the potential impact of that morning's Samarra bombings. He was not convinced that the Neighbors' Conference in Egypt was bearing fruit and cited GoI failings in integrating itself more effectively into the Sunni-dominant Arab world. He spoke of Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani's fatherly role in the Iraqi politics and cited his own efforts to moderate Iranian views of Iraq's national interest. He discussed legislative benchmarks without committing to assist with their passage through parliament this summer. End summary.

¶2. (C) Meeting at the former Prime Minister's request, on June 13, al-Jafari told the Deputy Secretary that the situation in Baghdad had deteriorated since the latter's departure from Iraq two years previously. Al-Jafari appreciated America's historical role in bringing Iraq out of the Saddam Hussein era, while cautioning that some USG decisions had led to unanticipated consequences. He recalled President Eisenhower's provision of funding for the French to fight in Indochina in the early 1950s as an alternative to providing troops -- stressing that Americans were more likely to accept taxes than casualties. Iraq, on the other hand, does not need funding so much as it needs assistance on the ground and "courageous political steps" from its US ally.

¶3. (C) The Deputy Secretary and former PM lamented the morning's events in Samarra, in which a sensitive shrine was hit by terror yet again; the Deputy Secretary noted that the attack had all the markings of al-Qaeda. Al-Jafari recalled the first Samarra bombing, after which he claims to have called all Friday prayer leaders to calm the rhetoric, went on the media quickly, wrote to political bloc leaders, and held emergency meetings on national security. He said terrorists in Iraq were getting encouragement and weapons from others in the region, including Iran (al-Jafari had seen evidence provided by the US).

¶4. (C) As part of a general critique of the current government, Al-Jafari suggested that the Neighbors' Conference in Sharm al-Sheikh was only a conference with no subsequent progress. The Deputy cited debt relief as a topic which came into a more hopeful focus in Sharm al-Sheikh and continued to be a priority. Noting the important role of regional countries, al-Jafari called for steps to end Iraq's isolation in the Arab world. He noted that he had advocated naming a Sunni president; Iraq, he said, is a minority in an Arab world with Sunni leadership. Baghdad receives visits from the US President, the British and Australian PM's, and others, but "no single Arab president or foreign minister." Iraq cannot allow its Shia character to isolate it from the Arab world, he argued.

¶5. (C) Ayatollah Sistani's moderating (fatherly) role in the Iraqi political arena has been helpful, agreed al-Jafari, but

should remain general in nature; religious authorities should play a supporting (and not a policy-making) role. (Note: al-Jafari claimed to be in regular contact with Sistani and the marjariah and to have met with Sistani each time he visited Najaf. End note.) Citing his March visit to Iran, during which he met "all of the Ayatollahs," al-Jafari said he had emphasized Iraq's new relationship with America and that Baghdad wished to benefit from the US presence (which is "not easy to say in Iran"). Iran's characterization of its interests in Iraq has some similarity, at least rhetorically, to US positions. Nonetheless, many in Iran recall the dangerous time they had with Saddam Hussein and react negatively when they see pressure on the Shia. For Iraq's part, it gets water from both Iran and Turkey and has interest in cordial relations. Iraq's "red line" is intervention into its internal affairs.

¶6. (C) Asked if he attended sessions of the Council of Representatives (CoR), of which he is a member, al-Jafari said he preferred to gather CoR members at his residence for bi-weekly discussions (claiming to assemble 50 members from all sects). He felt the CoR was not functioning at the proper level, and he limited his attendance to once every few months. He claimed that his participation at the Political Council for National Security (PCNS) was more useful. Pressed to assist the movement of key benchmark legislation, al-Jafari agreed the laws were important yet deflected the conversation to the weakness of the CoR, now hit by a "shameful" row over its speaker's behavior. The Deputy reminded the former PM that legislation is a key symbol of reconciliation -- emphasizing the potential sharing of hydrocarbon resources by a nation often characterized for internal fighting. Al-Jafari called for moving national reconciliation from mere statements and conferences to

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practical steps.

¶7. (U) This cable was cleared by the Deputy Secretary's staff.

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